Rioni (the districts into which Rome is still divided). Later on, they formed, together with the Riformatori, the Signoria, which was called the Signoria of the Bandaresi. A force of three thousand well-armed plebeians waited on their biddings. It was their office to execute justice against powerful evildoers and refractory nobles, and all who should shelter criminals in their fortresses ; and they began their work with the most rigorous severity. " There is no prince or baron in the jurisdiction of the Roman People," writes the Florentine chronicler, <c who is not terrified thereat and does not hold them in great dread, and who for fear does not obey the governors of Rome and their rulers." [1] Such was the Roman Signoria with which Catherine of Siena, at a critical epoch in her life, was to have to deal. And better had it fared with the Church, if it had been only the temporal lords of Rome who trembled before it I

Amidst this turmoil of political faction and moral corruption, men and women arose who looked for righteousness ; flowers of the spiritual life bloomed even in the bloodstained streets of Siena and on the arid desert of the seven hills of Rome. Catherine's work was, to some extent, anticipated by the Swedish princess, Birgitta (whom we now call St. Bridget), that flower of the north transplanted to the Eternal City, and by Giovanni Colombini, himself a Sienese.

Giovanni di Pietro Colombini was a rich merchant, belonging to the order of the Noveschi, one who had himself sat in the Signoria of the Nine. He was absorbed in mercantile pursuits and in the acquisition of wealth, until one day, to soothe his irritation when dinner was not ready and he wished to return to the warehouse, his wife bade him read a volume of the lives of the Saints. He chanced upon the legend of St. Mary of Egypt, and was completely converted by its perusal. Another of the Noveschi, who had also been one of the Nine, Francesco di Mino Vincenti, joined him, and the two consulted the pious Carthusian, Pietro Petroni, who bade them follow Christ in the most absolute

[1] M. Villani, **ix.** 87 ; Villari, *op. cit.,* pp. 234, 235 ; Gregorovius, English ed., VI. part II. pp. 403, 404.